

उन्मेष



नमस्ते शारदे देवि काश्मीर पुरवासिनि

Unmēsh

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Islamic Jihad in Kashmir has divided the Kashmiri speaking people vertically along religious lines, with the Hindu Kashmiris pushed almost to the last man across the Banihal Pass and forced to live as exiles. Perhaps it is one of the greatest ironies of history that people sharing the same language and the same land are so hostile to each other in spite of these common bonds. But that is what Islamic fundamentalism has done everywhere. It has divided societies and separated people.

Land and language, it is believed, are two most important factors that define the identity of a people. Of these the Kashmiri Pandits have lost the first and are on the verge of losing the second too. There are other determining factors also: customs, festivals, rituals, beliefs and traditions. But most of these are closely linked to land. The peace that a Kashmiri Pandit got from getting up in the wee hours and performing his *sandhya* on the banks of the river Vitasta or making his morning ablutions there, the spiritual satisfaction that he got from circumambulating the Hari Parvat and offering prayers to Goddess Sharika, the serene joy that he derived from attending the religious fairs at places like Tulmul or Kshir Bhawani and Gangabal, the spiritual experience that uplifted him while going to the numerous places of pilgrimage and worship dotting the most beautiful spots in the Valley -- in fact everything that gave him a sense of belonging and re-assurance has been almost irretrievably lost.

The predicament in which Kashmiri Pandits find themselves today is not so easy to face or overcome. Even as they are fighting for bare physical survival, they have before them a more grim and tough and long struggle to keep their identity alive. Time alone will tell whether they will succeed in this or not, but right now the prospects of their remaining a distinct social and cultural entity in the years to come do not seem to be very bright. The question is what are the exact factors that define and determine their distinctiveness? In other words, what is it that can hold the Pandits together, now that their geographical links with the land of their birth have almost snapped?

There have been migrating societies in history which have faced similar predicaments earlier. Two of these that easily come to mind are the Parsis and the Jews. Both were forced to flee their native land and seek shelter elsewhere in turbulent situations created by history. Both of them have managed to keep their identity intact in most trying circumstances, and thus providing Kashmiri

Pandits with models they could ideally follow. As far as Parsis are concerned, they came to Gujarat in India to protect their Zoroastrian faith from the wrath of Muslim invaders from Arabia, but had to give up their language in the process and adopt Gujarati as a condition to live in peace and preserve their way of life, holy fire and all. However, the way they adhered to their culture and religion was indeed amazing. Today there is hardly any community in India with such a strong sense of identity and such intense feelings of unity. The Jewish diaspora on the other hand spread across almost the entire globe and continued not only to survive but to contribute impressively in every sphere of human activity. They suffered persecution and holocausts unprecedented in human history. Yet they remained deeply conscious of their Jewish identity all through, remembering Jerusalem, the Kings and prophets and above everything else their relation with the Hebrew language. And eventually when their dream of returning to the promised land Israel became a reality, they resurrected their language and its almost extinct script so as to spell out their nationhood. Yehuda Amichai, one of Israel's leading modern poets, who originally wrote in German, refers to Hebrew as :

this tired language
torn from its sleep in the Bible --
Blinded it lurches from mouth to mouth --
The language which described God and
the Miracles says :
Motor car, bomb, God.

(Yehuda Amichai, *Selected Poems*)

The predicament of the Kashmiri Pandits is not much different from the fate suffered by the diaspora Jews. Like the Jews, there have been numerous attempts to wipe them from the face of the earth, the most recent being the most terrible. Their forced migration from the land of their ancestors where they had been living for millinnea is one of the most terrible tragedies of post-independence India. And again like the Jews, the Pandits' eventual return to Kashmir seems to be turning into an agonisingly long affair.

What then is the future of the Kashmiri Pandits as a distinct ethnic community forced to live away from their homeland? What is it that could hold them together and save their Kashmiri identity? Surely the Kashmiri language will have a most important role to play in this.

(To be continued)

NSKRI to record oral history of Kashmiri Pandits

Teams of NSKRI researchers will shortly fan out in different areas in Delhi and Jammu, and later in other parts of the country, where population of the displaced Kashmiri Pandits is scattered, to record oral history of the community. Equipped with tape-recorders and a questionnaire prepared by experts, the teams will approach articulate and knowledgeable elderly community members past the age of fifty, particularly those who come from a rural background, and interview them about their experiences of aspects of Kashmiri Pandit life and events of recent history concerning them that they may have witnessed but that have not been recorded anywhere so far.

The idea is to tap the vast reservoir of people's memories before it dries up, for obtaining facts about Kashmiri Pandit customs, traditions and history that have hitherto remained unknown but are vital for filling in numerous gaps and grey areas that exist in our records about them. In the views of NSKRI, this has become imperative in the present circumstances when the Pandits have been cut off from their homeland and their cultural roots and are forced to live with social groups having wholly different and even conflicting life-styles. A situation has in fact been created in which their customs and traditions, rituals and festivals are dying out calling for conscious and concerted efforts to revive them and save them from extinction. It may also be noted that there is an increasing tendency to identify Kashmiri culture totally with the Muslims in spite of the fact that the Valley has been a cradle of Hindu and Buddhist civilization for over three millennia. Accounts of Kashmir are almost invariably focussed on the way Kashmiri Muslims live, forgetting that the best that Kashmir has contributed in the fields of art and aesthetics, philosophy and religion, language and literature has come from the genius of the Pandits.

If at all they figure anywhere in such accounts it is only to endorse the view that the majority Muslims have all along been tolerant and magnanimous towards them. This gives a wholly and distorted picture of the reality in Kashmir and ensures that whatever is characteristic of Kashmiri Muslims and the Arab-West Asian culture they have adopted for

themselves is considered representative of all Kashmiris. Thus Afghan and Iranian music is passed on as Kashmiri music, Persian legends as legends from Kashmir and *baccha nagma*, also introduced by the Afghans, as Kashmiri folk dance form.

Strange as it may seem, the Pandits themselves have allowed such views to prevail, displaying no will to combat cultural onslaughts. What is worse, many among them in order to buy peace or curry favour with the ruling Muslims have gone to the extent of adopting Muslim ways and taking pride in earning sobriquets like "Muslim Brahmins", particularly after 1947. The gentle subtleties of their own culture and the cerebral graces that distinguished their way of life seem to have lost their significance and attraction for such Pandits. Gradually, they began to forget their traditions, their sense of values and ideals, their symbols of civilization and their cultural practices. The fact is that prior to their exodus in 1990, the Pandits had almost become willing instruments for self-destruction, both socially and culturally, and were left with hardly anything but their names.

The programme of recording oral history that NSKRI is going to undertake, assumes significance and urgency in such circumstances when amnesia is clouding from the Pandit minds their own real image. Questions that the NSKRI researchers will ask the elderly interviewees will be framed in a manner as to help bring back forgotten things from the limbo -- details of customs and socio-religious practices, once thought as essential but no longer in vogue, forgotten festivals and rituals that gladdened their minds in an age not too far back in time, aspects of folk life and folk religion abandoned in the pursuit of so-called modernity, traditions of art and erudition that gave way to temptations of dirty lucre, the vicissitudes that the community has witnessed in its struggle to survive. The possibilities are, indeed, endless.

Once the interviews are over, this information, which may come in shreds and bits, is to be compiled, collated, edited and presented as a coherent account of the community's social, cultural, religious and intellectual life.

'Shiva Drishti' :

An Exhibition on 'Shaiva Way of Seeing' to be organised by NSKRI

Spurred on by the success of its earlier exhibitions – one, titled 'Unmeelan' on Kashmiri Pandit cultural heritage and the other focused on the fruitful relationship between Stein and Kashmiri Pandit scholars titled 'Remembering Sir Aurel Stein', NSKRI is now going to hold yet another exhibition, 'Shiva Drishti' or the 'Shaiva way of Seeing' as part of its programme to project aspects of Kashmiri culture. The exhibition which was originally scheduled to be held alongwith the seminar on Kashmir Shaivism organised by the Institute in April this year, is likely to be held sometime is Feb-March next year to coincide with the celebrations of Shivaratri. The Institute also plans to release the first issue of its research journal 'Spanda' on that day.

Manifestations of Shiva, the most popular deity of Kashmiri Pandits, in Kashmiri art, philosophy, religion, literature and life will form the theme of 'Shiva Drishti', covering different aspects of the Shaiva faith from dualistic worship to the abstract monistic philosophy of the Trika School. The exposition will be mounted in various sections, the first section depicting Shaiva themes in Kashmiri miniature paintings and other forms of art. Pauranic depiction of Shiva and his consort Parvati and his family is a subject that has been extremely popular with the miniature artists of Kashmir, some of whose excellent works with form highlights of the exhibiton. Works symbolizing concepts of the monistic Shaiva philosophy, like the Swachchandanatha Bhairava will also be put on display with a hymn to him explained for the benefit of the visitors. Some wonderful paintings showing 'Tripura Sundari', of Shavite faith will also be put up as a reference to the close connection between the Shaivite and Shakta faiths.

While it may not be posible to have any sculptures of Shiva for display, photographs of some of the most



Amriteshwara Shiva : Kashmiri miniature painting
Photo : Courtesy - Sri Arun Jalali, Indore

splendid pieces, including the Shivalingas, will put up to give on idea of their beauty. Photographs of important places of Shaiva pilgrimage that dot the length and breadth of the Kashmir Valley will point to the importance of the Shaivism as a predominant faith of the region.

Core books of Kashmir Shaiva philosophy will form another significant section of the exhibition. These will included works by some of the modern masters of Trika, like Swami Lakshman joo, some of whose tapes may also be played to enable people to hear his voice explaining ideas and concepts lucidly in his unusually captivating manner and to locate the ambience of his benign presence blessing the event. Notes on the lives of some great Shaiva masters and

charts of their geneology will also feature in the section, together with portraits of the great Abhinavagupta and photographs of Swami Lakshman joo. Books of Lalleshwari's *Vakhs* and Krishna joo Razdan's *Lilas* will be displayed to show how Shaivite thoughts and themes have found their expression in Kashmiri poetry. Some of these may even be recited or sung to further enrich the ambeince.

Yet another feature of the 'Shiva Drishti' exhibition will indicate the importance of Shiva in Kashmiri Hindu religious festivals, rituals and rites. This section will exhibit ritualistic objects of worship during Shivaratri, the greatest festival of Kashmiri Pandit, as also on other occasions, depicting the widespread range of the Shaiva cult as a folk-religion. Aspects of Shaiva *Karmakanda* will be explained through write-ups, while Tantric drawings will be another feature of interest.

That the cult of Shiva had a sway over the culture of Kashmir from the earliest times is also indicated by

the geographical names of its mountains, rivers, springs and other sacred sites. According to the Nilamat Purana, the land of Kashmir is the material manifestation of Shiva's consort, Uma. It is she who is said to have taken the form of Kashmir's most important river Vitasta, gushing out of the hole created by Shiva by striking his trident on the earth. Legend has it that the whole city of Srinagar, the capital, was divided into eight wards, each supervised by a spiritual guardian called Bhairava. But, more than anything else it is the monistic philosophy called Trika or Kashmir Shaivism that has a universal appeal, with scholars and researchers throughout the world taking a keener interest in it than ever before. Shaivism also ties Kashmir and Kanyakumari in one great spiritual bond, underlining the essential spiritual and cultural unity of the country. Infact, it is the entire spectrum of this relationship -- spiritual, religious and cultural -- that the exhibition "Shiva Drishti" is expected to spotlight.

"Not all the people who visit Kashmir go there only to hunt, or to fish or to dance. Some take with them to the Happy Valley interests of more intellectual kind. And how could the traveller as he goes rambling about, fail to be impressed and intrigued by the mystery of those "natural images" which show the features of some divinity in the lines of rock or cliff, of an ancient site, by the solitary chanting of the old priest who in his rustic shrine celebrates the rites of bygone days, or by the common sight of people on the bank of a stream offering their sacrifices in honour of the *manes* of their ancestors. At every step one meets with local customs and one lives as it were in the very midst of folklore & ceremonies.

The ruins of Martand rise at the prow of their *Karewa* as proudly as a Greek temple on a promontory and the little shrine of Payar, carved out of ten stones has the perfect proportions of choragic monuments of Lysicrates. The curious results of Harvan excavations and the multifarious relief on these terracotta tiles, together with the few stucco heads picked up at Ushkar have much to tell about the barbarian invaders of India in the 1st century AD. But what is found in Kashmir is the kind of beauty in the midst of a nature still animated with a mysterious life which knows how to whisper close to one's ear and make the pagan depths of us quiver which leads us back consciously or unconsciously to those past lamented days."

— A. Foucher

Art Heritage of Kashmir

The story of Kashmir's art and architecture has never been presented in the manner it deserves. It has always been eclipsed by saucy bites of tourist material or gory details of the political conflict in which the region is engulfed for over half a century now. Nor has much path-breaking work been done in this direction, mainly due to the laxity and lack of interest displayed by the concerned authorities which have kept even the material discovered at the Burzahom site under wraps for reasons best known to them. We would perhaps have been still ruminating the stuff made available to us by R. C. Kak in his 'Ancient Monuments of Kashmir' more than six decades ago, were it not for the works of scholars like Herman Goetz, Percy Brown, Fischer and Huntington and the wonderful twin volumes on Kashmir bronzes and ivories brought out by Pratapaditya Paul. The fact is that inspite of all this brilliant work a comprehensive, clear and convincing picture of Kashmir's artistic heritage has yet to emerge. Viewed in this context, the series of three lecture-cum-slide shows organised by the National Museum Institute recently, was a really appreciable step. Being an artist myself and one who is deeply interested in the study of Kashmir's art history, I made it a point to attend two of the three lectures, missing only on the second. Apart from other things the thin attendance at the lectures, which was perhaps the result of lack of proper publicity, proved to be a dampner.

The lecture series and the slide shows, I must confess, did not leave me much impressed or enthused. The first of these lectures was on Kashmir bronzes and was delivered by Prof. J. L. Bhan, ex-Curator, Central Asia Museum, Srinagar, who is presently working with the National Museum. Titled 'Kashmir Art', the lecture had Prof. Bhan correlating and interpreting some excitingly new facts, leaving at the same time many questions unanswered about some dimly lit and dark areas which needed more light.

Prof. Bhan expressed his doubts about Hutmar being actually a Buddhist site or for that matter even Harwan, which is widely considered to be part of a Buddhist Stupa. There is no archaeological evidence to support this view, he argued to bring his point home. The logic of Prof. Bhan's argument, however, does not appear to be convincing or to have any substance. It is based on a faulty premise, for, as a listener pointed out, archaeological evidence alone is not sufficient to demolish the Buddhist connection of Hutmar or Harwan. I am inclined to believe with the listener that in a place like Kashmir, devastated

by large scale destruction and vandalisation of ancient Hindu and Buddhist monuments by Muslim zealots, it is very difficult to find much proof of the kind Prof. Bhan thinks is necessary to settle the issue. There are, however, other sources which point to the Buddhist character of the sites under question. Clear etymological evidence exists to prove this.

Take the case of Hutmar, for instance. It is a village above Mattan town on way to Pahalgam. Nestled on the foot of the forest-topped spur of a mountain, it skirts a *karewa* or a table-land known as Dardakot. That is exactly the place where the terracotta tiled location, identical in layout to the Harwan site, was unearthed more than nine years ago. The area must have been easily targeted by the iconoclastic zealots, but linguistic-etymological and phonetical-evidence clearly reveals it to be of Buddhist origin. Hutmar is a corrupt form of the Sanskrit 'Arhat Math'. Thus Arhat > Hut and Math > Mar; something that is corroborated by the derivation of several other place names like Dedmar (< Didda + Matha) and Zinimar (< Jina + Math). Dardakot, where the archaeological site is located also appears to have been a Buddhist place. The neighbouring north-side meadows and mountain regions extending from Gurez and continuing along the upper Kishenganga Valley above Sharada and stretching further upto Chitral, Yasin and Gilgit were known generally as Dardadesh and were strongly influenced by Buddhism which spread directly from Kashmir.

Likewise Harwan is etymologically derived from Shadarhadvana, meaning 'the Abode of Six Arhats (Buddhist saints)'. These derivations should be enough to settle the doubts about the Buddhist origin of these archaeological sites.

Prof. Bhan's lecture raised yet another question about the bronze sculptures of Kashmir, and again this question was asked by someone from the audience. How could these bronzes be termed as products of a distinct, formal and stylistic art movement that exclusively developed in Kashmir when their iconography, symbolisations and attributes of the dieties appear to be identical to what we see in art movement in the rest of India? In other words, what could be the distinguishing features of Kashmir bronzes explained aesthetically, formalistically and stylistically?

Prof. Bhan's reply to this important question was, unfortunately, oblique and tangential, touching only

its periphery and not the core. The subject actually can not be dealt in a casual manner but needs an exhaustive and indepth explanation. This would require not less than a couple of lectures devoted exclusively to it.

In his lecture-cum-slide show on 'The Monuments of Kashmir', Dr. R. C. Agrawal had little to add to what has already been said about the subject by scholars and experts except his conjectural drawings of the Harwan and Parihaspur *stupas*. It appears that Dr. Agrawal got his inspiration from Percy Brown's conjectural drawings of the Martand temple. Unlike Percy Brown, however, Dr. Agrawal does not seem to be fully aware of the characteristics of the Kashmir

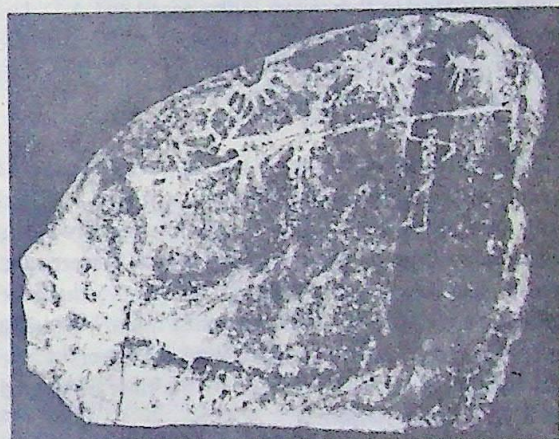
school of art and architecture that developed over the centuries. Totally ignoring the basic features that distinguish the Kashmiri school, he has taken elements from apsidal Buddhist architecture, particularly that of Ajanta and Sarnath, and applied them unthinkingly to the Buddhist structures of Kashmir. The slides of his conjectural drawings of Harwan and Parihaspur monasteries are devoid of any basis in the Kashmir school and are purely the projections of his imagination. The features he has depicted are actually those of non-Kashmiri Buddhist art. Even in their tumbled down condition, the Buddhist monuments of Kashmir do not provide any hint of what Dr. Agrawal has conjectured.

--- P. N. Kachru

Earliest attempt at art in Kashmir

Raj Nath Kaw

The earliest attempt at art in the neolithic period of Kashmir is evidenced by the discovery of an engraved stone slab found during excavations at Burzahom -- a key neolithic site in Kashmir situated 16 Kms. north-east of Srinagar on Naseem Bagh-Shalimar Bagh link road. The site is located on the ancient lake bed locally called *Karewa* and commands a panoramic view of the lush green fields of the Valley and the shimmering waters of the Dal Lake which is hardly 2 Kms away. The excavations at Burzahom have opened a new chapter in the history of Kashmir. They have thrown light on the earliest settlers of Kashmir about 2500 B.C. who were living in pits and square/rectangular chambers.



The engraved stone slab was found during excavations in Period II (Neolithic). Its face was placed upside down making it non-functional in the place in which it was found. The stone slab (base width 70 cm) is flat on both faces, the engraved side being smooth compared to the un-engraved one. Towards the top it is partially damaged, as a result the uppermost part of the scene is slightly lost. However, the break is not a fresh one.

The engraving depicts a hunting scene showing an antler being pierced from behind with a long spear by a hunter and an arrow being discharged by another hunter from the front. The top most portion shows two suns and a dog. Showing two suns may probably have some symbolic value and perhaps may indicate hunting in day light. If the presumption is correct then one sun may be depicting the rising sun and

another the setting sun. Another stone slab showing an incomplete pattern has also been found from the same structure. The engraved stone slabs were found fixed in a rectangular structure forming some sort of a tank for storage of water.

The neolithic culture of Kashmir valley has its own distinctive traits not shared by its counterparts from elsewhere in India. Its wide range of bone and stone tools, dwelling pits, perforated knives or blades, burials of animals with human skeletons and purposeful burial of only animals make it as something pits, application of red ochre on the dead, burials of animals with their masters, perforated knives of stone or harvesters and the characteristic bone tools link the neolithic of Kashmir with north China, Central Asia, some sites in Russia as also in Afghanistan and Iran.

Pandit Suna Bhatta Shastri :

A Bright Star in the Galaxy of Sanskrit Scholars of Kashmir

—S. N. Hundoo

[Steeped profusely in Shaivite lore, and an authority on Karmakanda, Pandit Suna Bhatta Shastri was an illustrious scholar of the calibre of Pandit Harbhatta Shastri and Pandit Madhusudan Kaul, with whom he had close association. His scholarly pursuits reached their culmination with his brilliant commentary on Shankracharya's *Saundarya Lahari*, a work that has been greatly admired by luminaries like Swami Lakshman Joo, Prabhakar Machwe and Prof. P. N. Pushp. Unfortunately the work has still not been published much to the dismay of his son, Shri S. N. Hundoo, who is profiling his life and work for the readers of 'Unmesh'.]



Pt. Suna Bhatta Shastri (SBS) was born at Srinagar (Kashmir) in an orthodox Kashmiri Brahmin family on *Vaishakha Shukla Panchami* in the year 1891 A.D. His father, Madhava Bhatta, and his mother, Sunamali, were saintly persons. Madhava Bhatta was well-versed in Shaivist lore and *Karmakanda*.

The family was well-known for its long lineage of savants in *Shaivagama* and *Karmakanda*, and SBS had eminently inherited the intellectual attainments of his forefathers. From the Rajakiya Pathashala (Government School for Sanskrit Education), Srinagar, where he studied, he passed with distinction the Prajna, Visharada and Shastri examinations of the Punjab University. He was barely sixteen years of age by the time he passed the Shastri examination.

After completing his education, SBS took to teaching and started his career in 1911 as a teacher in Sanskrit. He taught in various Government schools in the Valley till he retired as a senior teacher in Oct. 1946 at the Rajakiya Pathashala, Srinagar, where Pt. Balji Nath Shastri (Dr. B. N. Pandit) was then the Head Pandit. He passed away soon after his retirement, following a brief ailment, on *Bhadra Krishna Ashtami* in the year 1947.

A versatile scholar in Sanskrit language and literature, with rare erudition in *Shaivagama* and *Nyaya* philosophy, SBS was one of the brightest luminaries in the galaxy of Sanskrit scholars in the Valley in the first half of this century. The other luminaries of the time, with whom he off and on associated for literary and philosophical discussions and exchange of views, were Pt. Harabhatta Shastri, Pt. Natharama Shastri, Pt. Madhusudana Shastri and others.

Essentially a saintly person, SBS had drawn his basic inspiration at the sacred feet of Swami Rama and, later, as a disciple of Swami Mehtab Kak. He often spoke with profound reverence and devotion about these two great sages who had tremendously influenced his life on the path divine. Later on, he came in contact with Swami Lakshman Joo and Swami Vidyadhara and used to meet them off and on to gratify his spiritual appetite. Sometimes, he spent hours with Swami Lakshman Joo, once the focus shifted to a discussion on *Shaivagama* and the queries my father had in his mind. At times, he would go to have a *darshan* of Swami Paramananda and watch spell-bound the ecstatic moods and movements of this great saint-poet. Some of his poems and those of Sri Krishna Rajanaka, as also the Vakhs of Lalleswari, were dear to his heart.

Pt. Suna Bhatta's saintly disposition permeated his personality in all aspects of life and living. At school, he always gave his best to his students, who thoroughly enjoyed being associated with him as his pupils and looked upon him with utmost respect and reverence.

SBS gave lessons for several years, on Sundays and holidays, to Pt. Shyam Lal Kokroo of Zaindar Mohalla, a scholarly person and the then Assistant Governor of Kashmir, on the main Upanishds and on Saivagama. It was, however, Pt. Nilakantha Jyotishi (later, Swami Nilakanthananda Saraswati of the Divine Life Society, Rishikesh) who distinguished himself as the worthiest of all his pupils. A close relation of ours and a younger brother of Pt. Thakur Das, Pt. Nilakantha was greatly devoted to SBS and reverently called him "Panditji", looking upon him as a friend, philosopher and guide. Pt. Nilakantha used to come every Sunday morning to

our house during the thirties of this century to get lessons from my father on *Vyakarana*, *Nirukta* and *Shaivagama*. Pt. Nilakantha fondly accompanied my father on most of his visits to Swami Lakshman Joo and Swami Vidyadhara.

SBS undertook, around 1930, the ambitious project of writing a commentary in Sanskrit on Sri Shankarabhadgavatpadacharya's "Saundarya Lahari" (Ocean of Beauty), and this illustrious work was completed by him in 1938. That was, however, a very turbulent period in his life, for the upheavals that shook the family in the late thirties, in particular the most untimely death of his elder son (my elder brother), Amar Nath -- a young intellectual of 24 with a brilliant academic record-- completely upset his mind. These tragic events impeded his plans to publish his work until, ultimately, he passed it on to the Research Department of the Jammu & Kashmir Government, Srinagar in 1946 for publication by them. The political upheavals in the State following partition of the country, particularly in the wake of the tribal invasion on the State in the autumn of 1947, cast a shadow on the prospects of an early publication of his work, and it was with great difficulty that I could retrieve the manuscript from the Research Department in early 1948 -- solely with the help and assistance kindly extended to me by Pt. P.N. Pushp, the then Director of Libraries & Archives, Jammu & Kashmir Government, Srinagar -- before it could possibly get misplaced or lost from their shelves.

In June, 1980 on one of my pilgrimages to Ishwar Ashram, Srinagar, I submitted the manuscript of my father's work to Bhagavatsvarup Swami Lakshman Joo, the doyen of Saivagama for his kind perusal and the favour of a foreword. He returned the manuscript to me with words of appreciation and with a smile so divine, along with a Foreword to the work, entitled "Ashirwad", which reads as follows:

"The 'Saundarya Lahari' (the Ocean of Beauty) is one of the profoundest works of Shri Shankarabhadgavatpadacharya. Though basically a *stotra* (hymn) in adoration of the Devi, the Great Mother and spouse of the Lord Creator Shiva, the 'Saundarya Lahari' is a poem of rare excellence and beauty, besides which it provides an exposition of the Agamas and Tantras bearing on the worship of the Supreme Being in its aspect of Shakti, Creative Energy, known as Shrividyā. The Great Master has, in the process, unveiled the mystic aspects of *shrichakra*, *kundalini* and *para shakti* for the benefit and delectation of spiritual aspirants.

"Ten Tantras have been produced by Lord Shiva in connection with dualistic Shaivism, which are called Shiva Tantras. Eighteen Tantras have emanated from Him in connection with mono-dualistic Shaivism, which

are named Rudra Tantras. Sixty-four Tantras have appeared from the lips of Lord Shiva in connection with Monistic Shaivism, which are known as Bhairava Tantras.

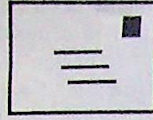
"Here, in the 'Saundarya Lahari', only the sixty-four Bhairava Tantras have been dwelt upon by Bhagavan Shankaracharya, and Pandit Suna Bhatta Shastri, in his Sanskrit commentary, named 'Chandrika', besides providing an elaborate exposition of *shrichakra*, *kundalini* and *para shakti*.

"From this commentary of Suna Bhatta Shastri and his masterly treatment of the subject, his profound erudition in Kashmir Shaivism is eminently evident. He has exquisitely expounded, from the Shaivaistic viewpoint, the much-concealed secrets contained in the 'Saundarya-lahari', and his exposition of the recondite portions of the Bhairavatantras constitutes a faithful rendering of the views of the Great Master, Shri Shankarabhadgavatpada."

Much earlier, in January, 1965, I had submitted my father's manuscript to Dr. Prabhakar Machwe, one of the leading scholars in Sanskrit in his time and a former Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi, for his comments. An excerpt from his comments dated 29th January, 1965 is reproduced below:

"Pandit Suna Bhatta Shastri has provided an exposition named 'Chandrika', bringing out clearly the intended connotations of the Great Master Shankara. The Commentary, no doubt, helps the reader understand and appreciate what has been so beautifully, yet mysteriously, described in Saundarya Lahari. The commentator has explained very elaborately the original text, giving apt quotations from Shrutis, Agamas, Upanishads and Tantrik works. He has left no room for doubt as regards the meaning or the content of the great work of the great author devoted to the Great Mother. The commentator is successful in unveiling the much concealed mysteries -- '*guhyaat guhyataram*' -- of the Saundarya Lahari and, with the help of this exposition, even one uninitiated into the Tantrika discipline and unfamiliar with the Shakta terminology can appreciate the poetic excellence of that fine piece of poetry and, at the same time, get acquainted with at least the elements of the Tantrik system."

I am thus absolutely confident that my father's Commentary on "Saundarya Lahari" will prove of immense interest and benefit to scholars, researchers and seekers the world over. Nevertheless, an inordinate delay has overtaken the publication of this great work for reasons beyond my control. My discomfiture in the wake of this delay has become all the more acute at this stage in my life and the urgency of getting through with this project stares me in the face.



अस्मिता के जलते प्रश्न

'उन्मेष' पत्रिका की प्रति मुझे आज ही उपलब्ध हुई है। पत्रिका के विषय से मैं प्रभावित हूँ। विशेष रूप से जिस प्रकार शैव-गोष्ठी का संक्षिप्त, सटीक विवरण उपलब्ध कराया गया है वह वस्तुतः प्रशंसनीय है।

आप लोगों से मिलना मेरे लिए सुखद अनुभव था। वस्तुतः जो जाति अपने अस्तित्व और अस्मिता के जलते हुए प्रश्नों को अपने भीतर सहेज कर रखती है, उसी जाति में विकास की सम्भावनाएँ बढ़ जाती हैं और सम्भावनाएँ स्वराज्य में निहित हैं। कष्ट, पीड़ा में से गुजरते हुए अब समय है कि स्वराज्य का विचार किया जाय। स्वराज्य का स्वरूप स्थिर किया जाए तभी संघर्ष की दिशा निर्धारित की जा सकती है। वह स्वराज्य न केवल मृण्मयता के स्तर पर हो बल्कि चिन्मयता के स्तर पर भी उपलब्ध हो। ऐसी मेरी समझ है।

डॉ० आशुतोष आंगिरस

14, स्टाफ कालोनी
एस० डी० कॉलेज
अम्बाला छावनी

The few who could not compromise

The herculean task that you have undertaken was long overdue from intellectuals of your calibre. Philosophical content of all religious thought is the reserve of chosen few in every society. You have said much in your editorial though in few words, but I would like to add only that we ourselves were mute spectators to the degeneration barring a few who could not compromise when history was being re-written by our pseudo-secular friends.

My request is to highlight those personalities also who withstood that onslaught. One of them is the great Prof. S. K. Toshakhani, who was one of the pioneers of women's education and it is due to such eminent persons that our society is solidly standing on its feet even in these catastrophic circumstances. There are many more and we owe much to them.

I would also like to live till I recite 'Shiva Stotras' and 'Panchastavi' in Tullamulla and Chakreshwar and in temples on the banks of Vitasta and not in Jammu and Delhi.

*Moti Lal Sapru,
10/107, Arjun Vihar,
Delhi Cantt.*

NSKRI deeply mourns the demise of Shri Som Nath Ghasi, a dedicated social worker and an architect of public opinion in the Kashmiri Pandit community. Shri Ghasi passed away at Miami, USA on July 20, 1999, leaving his numerous friends, admirers and relatives in a state of great shock and grief.

Shri Ghasi, who was keenly interested in the spiritual and cultural uplift of Kashmir, had shown a deep appreciation of the activities of NSKRI. In his death the Institute have lost a well-wisher and a sincere friend.

THE NSKRI FAMILY

The NSKRI is in its 3rd year of existence now. It has already become a fast expanding family which all are welcome to join. Through these columns we very sincerely thank all those who have responded to our call and joined the NSKRI as its life members and associate members. We would also like to thank all those friends and well-wishers of the NSKRI who have extended financial help in strengthening it by sending donations and advertisements in 'Unmesh'. Our thanks go also to all those who have helped the NSKRI's collection of heritage material, by donating paintings, artefacts, rare books and manuscripts for safe-keeping and publishing (in due course). An up-to-date list of all such members of the NSKRI family is given below :

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A group photograph of Kashmiri Pandits gathered at a 'Mekhla' ceremony outside the shrine of Rishi Peer (early 20th century)

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